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Occidental culture, what some individuals conceive and practice as "religious" is not infrequently conceived and practiced by others as "magical." 782 789

Apart however from all such questions and qualifications, by far the greater proportion of the miscellaneous private rites and observances, to the detailed description of which we now turn, are exclusively or predominantly "religious" rather than "magical." We shall take up in order: wish (or wish-thought), prayer, sacrifice, vows, oaths, dreams and visions, omens, divination, taboos. In general, under the first half dozen captions we shall be dealing more with "religious" phenomena, in the remainder more with "magical" ones, but there are certain overlaps and combinations of the two which will be apparent as we go along.

Wish and Thought: Blessing and Curse

That the Gros Ventres believed in the efficacy, more or less "supernatural," of certain wishes and thoughts about others, of benevolent and malevolent thinking, of—in this sense—blessings and curses, is clear. Exactly how the good or evil wish or thought wrought its effects is not too clear from our field data. 828

The Gros Ventres in general attach great significance to thought and wish. This theme recurs over and over again in their culture. Here are some illustrations. One of the names of the Supreme Being apparently meant: He who rules all by the power of thought. Some medicine men had special power to harm and kill by sheer wish. The Boy, in discussing the question, "Who among the beings, apart from the Supreme Being, known to the Gros Ventres was the most powerful?" finally narrowed his choice down to two, a certain boy and his sister as the most powerful of all. "The boy had power to do things with his eyes. He would only look and the thing happened as he wished, but that was only in combination with his sister. She would do the thinking and then he would do the looking," and the thing would happen, especially as a result of the girl's thinking.[1] The Boy thought long and intensively

[1] See Kroeber, 1907, No. 26, The Deserted Children, especially pp. 104-05. This may be the myth to which The Boy referred. Unfortunately we did not get a complete version from him.

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828 through the winter what to put in the letter (quoted infra, pp. 380-381) sent in the spring of 1943 to Cooper that would do something big toward restoring the latter to health. "'I think,'" remarked Thomas Main, "is commonly used by the Gros Ventres in speaking. When I am interpreting, a man will often say to me: 'Tell them this is what I *think* of him (or it).' There is an emphasis on thinking and on the power of thought."

We come now to the more specific data on good and bad wishing and thinking.

754 In 1939 while we were chatting about approbrious and insulting
828 terms, such as tsë:k (you ghost), in common use, The Boy distinguished these from malevolent thinking or wishing or cursing proper. "As a curse [proper] a person might say to another: 'You are not going to live long.' If a thing were serious enough, almost anyone might worry another with such cursing." On another occasion, the same summer, while speaking of the kinds of advice given children by their father, The Boy quoted his father, Lame Bull, as having said: "If a man were offended by his son and put a curse on his son, the curse would remain on the child."

828 Between our 1939 and 1940 visits to the Gros Ventres, The Boy
[123] had suffered a severe stroke (facial paralysis). At our first talk with him in 1940, Cooper expressed to him the very sincere wish that he would get well and live long. The Boy was visibly affected by this expression and spoke at some length as follows:

[626] "If a man does something of which the people disapprove very much, their *thought* is against him. They *think* badly of him. Against this mass thinking his own thinking cannot stand. Two people may have a battle of thinking. The outcome will depend on how each is developed in thinking, on their respective powers of thought. If all the people think badly of a man he becomes a sort of outcast.

"If someone has had some terrible misfortune and is beyond human aid and this becomes known, people will say: 'That is his sentence from above. Someone above thought that out. That is why he is in such desperate straits.' This would be something supernatural, something beyond the human.

"When you said you wished and thought I would live many years

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I was glad. Now your wish and thought are added to my own. 828
The human being can think and reason because somebody supernatural has endowed him with the right [ability] to think. The wishing itself helps."

A few minutes later, after he had told a recent dream he had had, he voluntarily returned to the wish topic. "When a little while ago you wished that I would get well and live long, I believe that at that moment in which you wished this the Supreme Being was listening to you and saw your thought and knew all about it. In my opinion besides your thinking that way as just a human being, your so thinking calls for some action from above.

"Take another example. Suppose I did something good to an old man, and the old man valued and appreciated it. I would not know he was pleased until he said: 'You have made my heart glad. I appreciate what you have done for me. Stand in front of me. I am going to ask in your behalf from the power above that allowed me to live this long. I am asking with my words, my prayer, my thought, my wish, for all I am worth. And all this wish has to be transferred to you."

In 1945 Thomas Main after a long and serious discussion with 626
The Boy and Thick on this matter of mass thinking and public 754
opinion, summarized the situation as follows: 828

"The Indian people, at least the Gros Ventres, thought the psychological effect of public opinion is so great and intense on the one on whom it was trained that it shortened his life . . and made him a nobody. If he had a long, long life it was certainly a miserable one. It was definitely known by the Gros Ventres that they actually thought people to death. Even today public opinion is difficult to cope with. The Boy says that if public opinion held anyone in high esteem, this would have the opposite effect and would help the person to climb the heights he wanted to attain. One who was not held in high esteem by public opinion never got anywhere in any endeavor." We may comment in passing that while there is question here of the ordinary operation of public opinion, mass thinking also seems to enter in: "They actually thought people to death."

In the following account by Charles Buckman the wish appears

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828 pretty clearly to be operative on its own although along with the [754 "natural" morale-building effect of cheering words.
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"There is an old Gros Ventre saying that if a man is ailing and some relative or friend of his comes in and says pleasant things to him or tells him he is going to get well, such a talk helps him. When someone gives the sick person a good talk and sincerely wishes he will get well, then the patient will do his best and get well. If you say unpleasant things to a sick man you will help to kill him. Don't hurt a sick man's feelings. The wish in the case is looked upon as something like a prayer. It has to be really meant. When a person talks that way to you when you are sick, [782] the Supreme Being will look down upon you and help you to get well. If a person is visiting a sick Indian, he will say good things to you, even though he knows you are going to die. A white doctor might say: 'There is not much hope.'

"When 32 years ago I was thought to be dying of appendicitis and had been given up by the doctors, old fellows came in and talked hopefully to me and put new life in me.

"In 1918, when I was ill with the flu, I overheard the doctor say: 'It is only a question of a half-hour. You better get a coffin for him.' Then another fellow, an Indian, came in and said to me: 'Well, what did the doctor tell you?' I said: 'Nothing.' He then said: 'He told that fellow over there that you are going to die. But he is not the governor of death. You are not going to die. You are going to live. You want to live for these children of yours. You are going to get well, and for the sake of these children. And think of the One Above [Supreme Being]. He's going to keep you. That's all I want to say to you. I wish you will be up in a few days.' And he walked out. It took me two years to recover fully."

In one of the songs, No. 67, sung in the Law Enforcers' Dance, the words, "The lead bull, comes in this direction," were explained [782] to us by The Boy as being a "half prayer." The singer was "wishing as hard as he could, so there would be plenty of game, especially buffalo, so the people would not have to go far to hunt."

525 The Gros Ventre, The Boy stated in 1939, "did not pray for 828 success in gambling," but just before a wheel game started, the player would take the wheel in his hand and hold one of the

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arrows to some part of the wheel and say something silently, "regarding for example, a horse he had captured in a raid: He had to make sure that what he so said was not a lie, all this 'was not a prayer,' but it brought good fortune in the game." 828● 525

In a big gambling contest, The Boy told us in 1940, between two opponents in the wheel game, one of them might take up the wheel and his arrow and "think of a war-deed" he had done. "He would use that as a sort of prayer for better luck in the game and would then win. . . . He here used the supernatural. He used words in his mind. He did not talk out loud. . . . He was sort of taking an oath indirectly. In an indirect way he would think: 'I am not telling a lie [about this war-deed]. The powers know I am not telling a lie.' He actually did the deed, otherwise he could not hope to have better luck in the game. It was a sort of indirect prayer. If he were really praying, he would do differently. He was not actually asking any being for anything. He was not appealing to or asking any one particular being, any single being or animal, but was just thinking of everything supernatural."

The Boy further explained in 1945: "The gamblers 'prayed' over the wheel silently. But they were not exactly praying. They were appealing against fate. They were wishing for good fortune and good luck in the game, and they were debating [sic] that thought by thinking of a particular time, when for instance, they brought back a good-looking horse from a war raid. . . . They made that wish silently. . . . They did not swear or take an oath or hold up a pipe. . . . The onlookers would wonder which one of his great-deeds the gambler was going to hit his opponent with . . . [later in the game] he could tell what [the war-deed] he had been concentrating on. . . . He had to tell the truth. . . . So practically he had nearly taken an oath."

When a new name was solemnly conferred on a person, the namer while brushing the person with sage would pray for the person after saying to him: "I am going to pray for you. And you yourself at the same time pray and wish for good things." 828 553

So much for the raw field data. What do they mean? Quite clearly, wishing and thinking under such conditions as indicated, while at times associated with and blending into prayer, into mere 828

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828 morale-building or morale-destroying remarks, and into public opinion operating on a purely secular or social level, were conceived of as distinct from these, as having a certain efficacy of their own. Quite clearly, too, such wishing and thinking could be either "good" or "bad," beneficent or maleficent, and mass-wishing or mass-thinking by many or all the people had a particularly powerful effect on the beneficiary or victim. Further, it seems reasonably clear that the more sincere and more fervent the wish, the more it came from the heart, the longer and more intensely it had been thought over and pondered and concentrated upon, the more efficacious it was.

Prayer

782 Prayer is here understood as the expression of position, gratitude, homage, or atonement to suprahuman beings. The expression may be made by word of by act or by both together; if by word, it may be vocal or purely mental. Petitions may be direct or indirect, in the latter case being expressed in an indicative rather than in an imperative form. In all cases the response on the part of the superhuman being or beings addressed is conceived as voluntary, not coerced. Prayer, unlike magic in the sense we have used the latter term, does not have automatic efficacy of its own, and does not force the superhuman being to act as the petitioner desires.

Understood in this broad sense, prayer, by word or act, vocal or mental, direct or indirect, enters into and in fact is the core of all the "religious" as distinct from the "magical" (and "social"), rites described in the preceding chapters and to be described in this present one. For instance, the wish, reported in the immediately preceding pages, may be looked upon as an indirect vocal or mental prayer; sacrifice, to be dealt with presently, as prayer by act, in this case by gift.

Praying had none of the drawbacks of power-seeking or power-possessing. It was urged unreservedly on and practiced by everyone. Its efficacy was universally believed in; at least we recorded no instance or hint of skepticism in the hundreds of references to it made by our informants.